

Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable With Robert L. Gordon III,
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family
Policy, Via Teleconference Subject: Military Spouse Employment
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WILLIAM SELBY (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public
Affairs): And I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense
Bloggers Roundtable for Tuesday, May 15th, 2012. My name is William
Selby with the Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs, and
I'll be moderating the call.

Today we are honored to have as our guest Robert L. Gordon III,
deputy assistant secretary of defense for military community and family
policy, who will highlight the Military Spouse Employment Partnership, a
targeted recruitment and employment partnership that connects American
businesses with military spouses who possess essential 21st century
workforce skills and attributes and are seeking portable, fulfilling
careers. Somebody just joined?

Q: Yeah. Karen Francis.

MR. SELBY: Karen, you're fifth in line. And I was just getting
to the blogger rules. Everybody pretty much knows them by now, but
please remember to clearly state your name and blog or organization in
advance of your question. Keep your questions succinct and to the point.
And please keep your phone on mute if you are not asking a question.

And with that, sir, if you have an opening statement, Mr.
Gordon, you can go ahead with that now.

ROBERT GORDON: How do you do?

Hi, everybody. How's everyone?

Q: Very good, sir.

MR. GORDON: Excellent. We just got joined by someone as well.
Is that right?

MR. SELBY: Yes, sir. Somebody else just joined?

Q: Kelly Hruska with the National Military Family Association.

MR. SELBY: Thank you, Kelly. I just got over the rules and the opening statement; and if you'd put your phone on mute while you're not asking a question. Mr. Gordon is about to go into his opening statement.

MR. GORDON: Thanks. Hi, Kelly. Glad you are able to join us today as well. And as you all know, I'm Rob Gordon. I'm the deputy assistant secretary of defense for military community and family policy.

I just want to start off by thanking you for what you do. It's important in this day of information technology and attempting to disseminate information in the most accurate way possible to outreach to our community, especially our blogger community, because you all are points of contact and direct communication with our military community. That's why this is so important.

And I talk to my staff a lot about ensuring that our service members and their families can make informed choices at the end of the day. The only way we can do that is to get information to our military community so that they know what our programs are and they can make those choices in terms of consumption for their empowerment and their support.

So what I'd like to do today is talk about our Military Spouse Employment Partnership. Some of you have been on these calls in the past and know that we have had this partnership now for almost a year. We inaugurated the Military Spouse Employment Partnership on the 29th of June of last year. And at that point in time, we inaugurated some new partners.

We currently have 96 partners, and those are employers. And I just want to emphasize it's not just corporations. These are what we call Fortune 500-plus companies. They do include small businesses, academia, the health industry, some nonprofit corporations, and some government entities as well, to provide portable, teleworked jobs that turn into career paths.

Now, I want to emphasize career path as well. This is not just about employment, but career tenure for our military spouse community.

And what I want to do is kind of give you a sense of where we are today and what's just about to happen. As I said, we have created this program. It's been almost a year. I'm delighted to say that, with our partners, we've had some success with the program.

To date, on our Military Spouse Employment Partnership website, employers have posted over 440,000 jobs. And this is since the 29th of June. Over 20,000 spouses have found employment through the program itself. We currently have 96 partners.

We're going to grow that actually this Thursday with an event here at the Pentagon -- and I hope some of you are coming -- here at the

Pentagon in the afternoon. We will inaugurate another 35 employers, and that will bring us to over 130 employers for the Military Spouse Employment Partnership.

And the key is this notion of Fortune 500-plus, first of all, the fact that we have a variety of companies, basically from small businesses to large companies, so spouses can find jobs in accordance with the situations they find themselves in and the kind of success they want to achieve.

There are some spouses who want part-time jobs, others who want full-time. So through the partnership, we include partners who can provide a menu of different jobs, basically, for our spouses.

The second we get it in writing, I just want to emphasize that this is a program where our partners do sign a memorandum of agreement. And it is with that memorandum of agreement that we can ensure that, A, we are provided information on spouse hiring; B, that we've got the kind of support that we need with respect to the companies within their internal machinations, especially human resources and job openings; and then C, we've got a great mentorship program for new companies that are coming in with our corporate partners and government and nonprofit agreeing to become mentors for those new companies. And finally, what's instrumental, as we all know, with our spouse community are jobs that are transferable, that are portable, teleworked, some brick and mortar as well, that really do meet the needs of our military community, and specifically our military spouses.

So as I said, we're just about to inaugurate 35 new members. We are really excited about the progress we've made. We are continuing to innovate and refine the program. Those of you who have been following MSEP probably note that we have a brand new 2.0 website at www.MSEPJobs.com.

We are really excited about the new functionality of that website, and we can get into that during the question-and-answer period.

And once again, I appreciate everything that you do.

With that, let me open it up for discussion and questions.

MR. SELBY: Thank you very much, sir.

And somebody doesn't have their phone on mute; if you could just once again please place your phone on mute if you're not asking a question.

Our first question will come from Thom. You were first online.

Q: Yes, sir. My name's Thom Goering. I'm with Navy Cyberspace, NavyCS.com.

My question -- I believe when the program first started, the unemployment rate for military spouses was about 25 percent -- excuse me

-- 26 percent. And there was a wage gap. And there's a wage gap up until the most frequent -- or recent wage increase for military pay. That pretty much closed the gap with civilians. At least that's the way it's being portrayed.

The family gap in pay is something that really hasn't been addressed up until this program came into place. The GAO and other research studies are being completed to see if there is a gap in the military pay. Are they going to start looking at the overall families earning income and potential, and when the moves are included in it? And hopefully that question made sense.

Thank you.

MR. GORDON: Yeah, it did. And, in fact, the GAO is looking at that. We started off -- in fact, last year we looked at what the challenge set was for this program. And we are hanging our hat on two areas in terms of measurement.

One is reducing the unemployment rate for our military spouses. That was 26 percent last year. And we are doing a data call basically to our partners so that we can have accurate information in terms of those number of hires and the degree to which we reduce that gap over this year. And as I said, the program will be one year old on June the 29th.

The second is the wage gap that you just mentioned. It's 25 percent as of last year. And I'm happy to say if you go on the website now, you will see how the jobs do run the gamut, from vice president of engineering firms to a barista at Starbucks; from part-time work to full-time work.

One of the main features of this program is that we listened to our spouses, and they wanted to ensure they had a range of different sorts of opportunities. So with the many partners that we will have, those over 130 partners, we will have the ability, in our view, to close that wage gap. And again, that's information that we will get from our employers at our one-year anniversary. So we'll be able to report on our progress.

But thanks very much for the question.

Q: Thank you, sir.

MR. SELBY: And, moving on, Dale.

Q: Yes, sir. Congratulations, and thank you for the great support to the spouses.

MR. GORDON: Thank you.

Q: I do have a question, though. It's 440,000 jobs have been posted, but only 20,000 spouses have been hired. That's about 5 percent. Is there a reason why it's only 5 percent?

MR. GORDON: Sure. Remember, our spouses are competing with everybody else. This is not spouse preferential treatment. So even though these jobs are being posted on the website, they are not exclusive to our spouses. These are jobs that companies have to fill, at the end of the day.

And then our spouses have the choice, at the end of the day, in terms of what jobs they want to pursue or not. So these companies continue to get these jobs filled by the broader population set, but they are providing them basically to our spouses on our website so our spouses know exactly where to go.

You know, we got a target of 20,000 hires by the White House by December of 2013. We have already hit that target. So I'm really, really excited about the fact that -- actually, it's not to me only 20,000 spouse hires. It's actually 20,000 spouse hires. It's not the only; it's that when you think about the 20,000 -- let's take you through some of the numbers here; 20,000 spouses hired. Let's say we use a median basis of \$20,000 per job. That's \$400 million of additional household income in our military community. So I would argue it's not "just." Again, our spouses are competing. This levels the playing field for them to find jobs. So we plan to continue to push the envelope on the number, aggregate number of jobs on that website, to provide our spouses opportunities.

Q: That's wonderful. I wasn't being critical. I was just trying to figure out how it would work for --

MR. GORDON: (Laughs.)

Q: -- for the spouses. So thank you.

MR. GORDON: Yeah. And I know that. And I wasn't addressing -- when you said "just," I just wanted to kind of put that into context. You know, we really believe that we've moved the needle on household income in our military community. And I'm glad you had me explain the fact that, you know, this is not preferential treatment, again, for our spouses. These jobs basically are available for, you know, American citizens writ large. We are very privileged to have these jobs put up on our website. But our spouses still have to compete.

Q: Thank you, sir.

MR. GORDON: You bet.

MR. SELBY: And I believe somebody else joined us. Is there anybody on whose name I haven't gotten yet? OK.

Q: Molly Blake from Blue Star Families. I joined you. Sorry.

MR. SELBY: Thanks, Molly.

MR. GORDON: Hi, Molly.

PETTY OFFICER: Sorry.

Q: Hello.

MR. SELBY: And thank you very much.

We're going to go on to Wendy.

Q: Yes. Good morning. Thanks for taking my question.

To speak to the 5 percent amount of military spouses who have been hired, to increase that number, I know on installations, especially Navy bases at our local -- first, let me say it's Wendy from My Military Life and the USAA spouse community. Sorry; I forgot that part.

Like, our local fleet and family has military spouse employment specialists that are dedicated to helping spouses find jobs. And I'm wondering if this program taps into those folks that are already working with spouses and on -- you know, that's branch-specific, because I know Army has their own community service, and so does Air Force.

So are we helping spouses in that regard? Are we using our resources to help raise that 5 percent number with resume help and translating volunteer experience to actual resume bullets to help increase that 5 percent number?

MR. GORDON: Yeah, good question. First of all, I think we need to be careful about this 5 percent. It's not 5 percent. It's 22,000 jobs who have found -- spouses who have found jobs through the website. Regardless of if we have 200,000 jobs, a million jobs, 400,000 jobs, there's a demand function in terms of number of spouses who come to the site, their searching, and then, of course, their engagement in terms of submitting resumes and a job application.

So it's actually not 5 percent. To divide the number of spouses into the total number of employer jobs is not a real number, if you know what I mean. It really does have to do with the number of our spouses going to the website and then the number of our spouses actually applying for the job. So we have to be very careful with that 5 percent number. It doesn't really mean anything, if you know what I mean.

The second piece to your question is, you know, we've got the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities Initiative. So within this initiative -- and it's a spouse-centric approach to education and careers -- with Military One Source, as you said, with our family centers around our installations, you know, we engage in interview skills, resume preparation, understanding the work environment. Our child-care facilities are absolutely instrumental, as we know, to the employment piece, because our spouses need that sort of child care available for them to go to work.

We have also My Career Exploration in terms of career assessment and helping spouses to understand what their interests are and what their

skills are as well. And we have a My Education and Training component as well to take a look at, for example, addressing the barriers to obtaining licenses and credentials. And as many of you know, we are working very closely with the states across this country to ease some of the burden of our spouses being able to transfer from one state to the other in terms of their credentials and licensing. So, yes, we have a much more comprehensive program. This is not just about employment and careers. It is about spousal-centric education and career opportunities. And I'm glad you brought that up, because there needs to be -- there always needs to be a robust, high- tech and -- (inaudible) -- component to outreach and nurturing and supporting and empowering our spouses. And so we're very mindful that we need both approaches.

Q: All right, thank you for answering my question.

MR. GORDON: You bet.

MR. SELBY: And Amy, you're next.

Q: Thank you. First of all, thank you so much for continuing to host these Blogger Roundtables. They're really informative and really great. I really appreciate it.

Mr. Gordon, we've heard at SpouseBuzz.com a lot of feedback from readers saying that while they appreciate the program, the majority of the jobs seen available with the companies that you've partnered with, at least in the past or towards the beginning of the program, don't really have a lot of jobs available for spouses with degrees.

Now, you gave some examples of, you know, running the gamut from vice president to more technical jobs. And I understand that you -- (inaudible) -- and adding new companies, like you're doing this week. But I'm wondering if you have any statistics. How many of the companies this week are offering jobs that require degrees that our spouses may already have?

And do you know, of the 20,000 jobs that have been -- that (spouses ?) have gotten over the last year, how many of those are jobs that require college degrees, and how many of them are jobs that are maybe more basic? The barista example that you gave, for example.

MR. GORDON: Yeah, good question. No, we don't have that readily available yet. We're doing a data call to the companies. Yes, early on, you know, maybe when we had 90,000 jobs, you know, on the website, there were -- there could have been some issues in terms of skill match.

I can tell you, with literally over 400,000 jobs, you know, it really does run the gamut. Let me enjoin all of you to go to the website just to get a sense of what those jobs are up there, so you get a sense that it -- we wanted to make sure that we had a full spectrum of jobs for our spouses.

So we've been able to fix that. And, you know, with these additional 35 companies coming on board, we're very excited by increasing the variety of those jobs. Now, I will tell you, we know, through My CAA and other data, you know, that our spouses are consuming education in terms of health care; no surprise. Education is another one as well. And we want to be much more rigorous in the future, you know, as we add on partners, to ensure that we're adding partners on where our spouses do have those skill sets.

So we're going to, in the future, focus on a lot of health care companies. We're going to open the aperture in terms of education companies, or organizations, should I say. But also, we also know that our spouses are interested in government jobs. So we have just begun, you know, to move in terms of market penetration for our government jobs. As you all know, we have USAJobs.gov. But we want to be much more strategic in being able to provide additional government jobs for spouses as well.

So we feel very good about the fact that we've got a great variety now of jobs for our spouses so that they have the choice, at the end of the day -- part-time, full-time, engineering or service-related, you name it. And we think we've got the kind of variety we need for our spouses to find a job that conforms to their desires and their needs.

Q: Thank you so much.

MR. GORDON: You bet.

MR. SELBY: And Karen.

Karen, are you still there?

OK, we can -- we'll move on to Kelly, then.

Q: Hi. Can you hear me now?

MR. SELBY: Yeah. Is this Karen?

Q: Yes. I'm sorry. I'm on my cell phone out in --

MR. GORDON: Hi, Karen.

Q: Hey, Rob. How are you?

MR. GORDON: Fine, thank you.

Q: You just started talking about something that I was going to ask you about, the government jobs. Specifically, people who have counseling degrees and certification from state one moving into state two.

I'm wondering, is there any possibility that we might be able to find positions for people with that kind of degree within DOD or the VA where they would not need to keep, you know, recertifying? Even with

reciprocity, it takes a while. But can we see about -- will there be positions that MSEP is going to be focusing on that would be military spouses taking care of military spouses? And I'll mute again, because I'm in the middle of a really loud place. MR. GORDON: Well, thank you for that. And thanks for putting that idea on the table.

You know, as we move to now our 2.0 version, you know, we're looking for these types of ideas. So that's one we'll take a look at. As I said, we're just at the very beginning of starting to build out a government strategy as well. We've been focusing primarily on, you know, those Fortune 500-plus organizations. But quite frankly, we've been thinking about and we already have some government agencies who are a part -- government programs who are part of the MSEP program.

So keep those kind of ideas coming. We are again going to make sure we're connecting to the field and listening to what jobs our spouses want, where they're getting educated, the issues that they've got in terms of retaining employment, and the kind of careers they want to pursue. And if this is one of those areas, I can clearly tell you that we'll take a look at it.

MR. SELBY: You got that, Karen?

MR. GORDON: (Laughs.)

Q: Sorry, keep having to mute. I'm in the middle of a very noisy parking lot. But thank you, Secretary Gordon.

MR. GORDON: I understand. (Laughs.)

Q: Great answer. Thanks.

MR. SELBY: Understood.

And back to Kelly. Sorry about that.

Q: No worries.

I just wanted to thank you. It's a wonderful program. I'm really pleased to see that you've included overseas positions as well. You seem to have a healthy representation of jobs for our military spouses living overseas.

And one thing I did want to ask is there are other job portals, like Hiring Our Heroes, that the federal government are promoting. Is there any plan in the future to sort of cross-reference some of those platforms, or at least provide some links on the website so that if spouses don't know about some of those other resources, they would be able to find them?

MR. GORDON: Yes. And, in fact, we should have those on our website already. We do. We've got our partners. We, of course, have a close professional relationship with the Chamber of Commerce as well. And so those Hiring of Heroes of events you'll find on the website on the

right-hand side. You'll see a number of hiring fairs associated with some of our partners. And we do have some links already; (inaudible) -- Joining Forces, of course, and USAJobs. We'll take a look at those, Kelly. We would love if this group can provide some feedback on others that you think we should be carrying on the website. But we do have quick links already available.

But as I said, if you've got some ideas in terms of additional programs or institutions that are very ensconced in (the space ?) for military spouse hires that we don't cover, please provide those.

Kelly, I also want to say thank you very much for all your service. Some of the group may know this, that you and your spouse are moving on overseas. It's -- where are you headed to, Singapore?

Q: Yes. Yes.

MR. GORDON: Yes.

Q: And that was the first place I checked on MSEP. (Laughs.)

MR. GORDON: (Laughs.) Well, I just want to thank you for your service, and the best of luck and appreciation for what you and your husband do to support and lead our military community.

Q: Well, thank you very much.

MR. GORDON: And, you know, Godspeed in your travels.

Q: Thank you. And I found the links. Thank you.

MR. GORDON: Good. OK.

MR. SELBY: Thank you.

And on to Molly.

Q: Hi. Good morning. Molly Blake from Blue Star Families.

MR. GORDON: Hi, Molly.

Q: Hello.

I am in Yuma, Arizona, and I just wanted to report that it's 104 degrees here this morning.

MR. GORDON: (Laughs.) I've been to Yuma.

Q: I'm sorry. I'm so sorry for you.

MR. GORDON: (Laughs.) Q: I just had a quick question. I've just been kind of going through the website as you guys have been talking and searching for jobs.

MR. GORDON: Yeah.

Q: When you call the 1-800 number, if I'm writing a blog post about this, who are you going to be talking to specifically? And if you covered this, I apologize. I came in a few minutes late.

MR. GORDON: Yeah, we've got -- that 1-800, it used to go to our Military One Source site, in fact. And I still think that is the 1- 800. I'm looking at the 342-9647.

Q: Yes.

MR. GORDON: We -- you know, of course, Military One Source we've got at the ready on the phone, our MOS consultants that can help. And the reason for that, too, is, you know, it's not just about MSEP. It's also about those things that I discussed a little bit earlier in terms of interview skills, resume preparation, you know, child care, transportation, career assessment.

Military One Source provides all that. And I would love if this community could spread the word on that. Even with our military spouse employment, it is within the context of spousal education and career opportunities. So we're really excited that we've got this SECO (cell ?) at Military One Source to provide a range of services, from employment, you know, through career assessment for our spouses. But that's where that number goes.

Q: OK, great. Thank you so much.

MR. GORDON: You bet.

MR. SELBY: And Chuck was on -- Chuck Simmins is on the line too. He said he may or may not have a question.

Chuck, did you want to --

Q: Yes.

MR. SELBY: -- ask a question? OK.

Q: I realize that many of the -- many of the government jobs available to spouses are civil service-type jobs.

MR. GORDON: Mmm hmm. (Acknowledging.)

Q: But if I understand correctly, on every military base there are a number of positions that are not civil service.

MR. GORDON: Mmm hmm. (Acknowledging.)

Q: Is there any sort of preference for military spouses to, for example, work in the post exchange or other similar-type functions that are not part of DOD's civil service?

MR. GORDON: Yeah, that's a good question. Thanks for centering that. You will find that in our exchange system and our commissary system, our defense commissary agency, they have been very proactive and aggressive in terms of pursuing military spouses for employment. And we've got some great numbers. And, in fact, DECA is a military spouse partner as well. So they're adhering, too, to that memorandum of agreement.

But, you know, the good news is -- and our military community doesn't know this writ large; some do -- that both the exchange system and DECA have been very avid supporters of our military spouse community in terms of employment. We want to continue, as I said, to open the aperture in terms of those government agencies and activities that we can encourage to improve the employment roles for our spouses.

But, yes, I think you'll find as well at DECA and the exchanges, of course, that those are portable jobs. You know, in other words, as spouses move from post to post or base to base, they can port those jobs with them as well through the exchanges and DECA.

Q: Great. Thank you.

MR. GORDON: You bet.

MR. SELBY: Thank you, sir.

And sir, did you have any more time for a few more question, or -- because we're through --

MR. GORDON: You know, I think --

MR. SELBY: -- with everybody. So I think we can --

MR. GORDON: We may be -- thank you. Yeah, we are at time; maybe one more question. Can we -- let's stick one more in, please. MR. SELBY: All right.

Thom, since you were first online, you can go ahead with another question if you have one.

Q: Well, I'll throw one because I'm looking for a sound bite. (Laughs.)

MR. GORDON: (Laughs.)

Q: Sir, the 35 new companies that are coming on board on the 17th, is there an overwhelming -- what's their overwhelming motivation for doing it?

MR. GORDON: Our spouses are a great hire for the 21st century. Really, that's it. I mean, you look at the skill sets that our spouses have in terms of a 21st century -- which is a human century -- in terms of being able to appreciate and value diversity, having the skill set,

the organizational skill set, the loyalty, showing up on time, operating in uncertain settings.

Those are our spouses. Those are the kinds of skill sets that they have accrued over a lifetime of the military lifestyle that makes them excellent hires, outstanding hires, for a 21st century workforce environment. And that's why those companies are signing up. They get it, and they want to be a part of it.

Q: Outstanding. Thank you, sir.

MR. GORDON: You bet.

MR. SELBY: Thank you again for that, sir.

I would like to thank everybody on the line today for your participation, and especially thanks to Mr. Gordon.

Mr. Gordon, if you have any closing comments, the floor is yours.

MR. GORDON: I think two things. I greatly appreciate what you all do. I will say we are continuing to improve the program, and we need your help. We need the help of the community to understand what's working, how they think we can improve it. We feel very, very good about this year's momentum and being able to add some marquee companies to hire our spouses. But we want to continue to improve the program. And I look to this community and to our broader military community to do so.

So thanks for everything you do. I hope some of you will be at the event, which will be on this Thursday, here in the Pentagon. And let's move forward to support and empower our community together.

MR. SELBY: Thank you so much, sir. And thanks again, everybody on the line. Today's program will be available online at the [DodLive.mil](https://www.dodlive.mil) link, where you'll be able to access a story based on today's call, along with the source documents, such as the audio file and a print transcript.

Again, thank you, everybody, for your participation. This concludes today's event. Feel free to disconnect at this time.

Q: Thank you.

Q: Thank you, Mr. Gordon.

Q: Thank you.

END.